

# Freeway Causes Problem

Hearings Open Pandora's Box

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Interim committee hearings frequently open Pandora's boxes of controversy. More rarely, they sometimes reopen such a box on an issue long thought settled, and people are surprised and entertained by the resulting verbal fireworks.

This latter situation arose at a recent meeting of the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources, Planning, and Public Works, Fifth in a series on the general topic of highway and freeway planning procedures and criteria, this particular meeting was intended to review the impact of freeway location on areas of historical importance. As a case in point, the selection of the approved freeway route in the vicinity of the Old Sacramento Historical Area by the State Highway Commission was picked as the subject for discussion.

The committee chairman opened by stating that the group recognized the complexity and controversy of the problem before it, and had neither the intent nor the responsibility to judge which alternative freeway route might be the best. Its sole purpose was to learn the methods by which the division of highways selected the alternate routes which were considered, and the criteria used by the Highway Commission in approving the route finally picked.

THIS IMPARTIAL opening did little to avert the raging flood of polemical oratory which quickly rose. Thick, costly survey and study reports were used like weapons to crack opponents' arguments, as were maps and scale models. To appreciate the Donnybrook, it is necessary to know what had gone on in Sacramento a few years earlier.

Early in 1960, the Sacramento City Council retained a well-known firm of urban planning consultants to develop a 20-year plan for the downtown area, to include among other things, the freeways and other conduits necessary to carry the increasing flow of vehicular traffic. A citizens' committee on the plan was also set up.

Among other things, the plan developed recommended a north-south freeway through the downtown area, roughly paralleling the Sacramento River, which became popularly known as the "2nd-3rd Street Freeway." This route would particularly allow for development of a historical area between the freeway and the river. The council approved the suggested freeway route in November, 1960.

THE CITIZENS' committee invited 173 Sacramento organizations to present their views. Out of 210 replies, 159 favored the route. But the controversy over the size of the historical area waxed hot in the local press. The division of highways held the required public hearings on the alternate routes in February, 1961, and the State Highway Commission formally adopted the routes, including the 2nd-3rd Street, in May, 1961. In December of that year, it held another hearing specifically on the historic problems involved, and approved slight realignments to increase the historical area.

Supporting the presently approved route at the legislative hearing were the chairman of the Highway Commission, the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency, the Sacramento City Planning Office, and the State Division of Beaches and Parks. Still objecting vigorously were many spokesmen for historical organizations, a planning expert from the University, and a disappointed real estate developer who failed to get a contract to exploit the historical area. Several suggestions for changing freeway procedures were mentioned, but none were generally approved.

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